

Dear Chairman Powell and Commissioners,

As a citizen who wants to be informed about the political and electoral issues that affect my life, I am greatly disappointed by the lack of informative television programming.

Local public affairs programming is virtually non-existent--constituting less than one half of 1% of all local programming. More than half of news broadcasts prior to the 2002 elections did not include a single campaign story. Our democracy is at risk when many Americans don't know basic facts about the candidates or the issues, as was the case in the 2000 elections.

Since broadcasters have clearly failed in their obligation to serve the public interest, the FCC should define meaningful public interest requirements that include local civic and electoral affairs programming. At a minimum, broadcasters should air three hours per week of local civic and electoral affairs programming, with at least two hours devoted to substantive election coverage in the six weeks prior to Election Day.

As the elections approach, a well-functioning democracy demands that citizens have access to a diversity of opinions and voices on the choices confronting us.

Having watched last night's debate and finding it very helpful, I am glad to add my own appeal to this message because I was thinking about this very thing. Since TV is the major source of news for many people, I think it shocking that local candidates get no exposure via this media. State senators and representatives need more than League of Women Voters candidates nights. They should have the opportunity to say what issues they think are important and where they stand. This opportunity should also be well informed by the nightly news. Regional broadcasters are very lacking in using this opportunity to help voters make a careful and intelligent choice. There should be required, free air time for legitimate candidates, not just ads. It means only the wealthy get to run easily.

Sincerely,

Rev. Fidelia A. Lane

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